Design Resource

Kantha Embroidery - Kolkata

A Running Stitch Artwork

by
Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B
NID, Bengaluru

Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/kantha-embroidery-kolkata

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3. Making Process
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Introduction

Kolkata, the commercial capital of Eastern India, is the capital of the state of West Bengal. The city, which is known as the cultural capital as well as the city of palaces, was earlier known as Calcutta until it officially changed to Kolkata in 2001. The city is situated on the east bank of the Hooghly River and is connected with the rest of the country via the Howrah bridge. From the list of various traditional arts on handlooms and handicrafts, originated in the state, Kantha is one of the oldest forms of embroidery that persists among the masses. The name 'Kantha' is derived from the Sanskrit language meaning 'rags' that reflect the fact that Kantha embroidery is made up of discarded garments or clothes. Kantha embroidery, a household craft, is considered unique for its ability to convey a story with artistic expression. Hence rural households make use of it to create quilts for their families, as well as embroider personal fabrics and garments such as sarees, dhotis, and handkerchiefs.

The craft went through a major setback due to falling recognition in the early stage of the 20th century until it was revived by the Kala Bhavana Institute of Fine Arts in the 1940s. It was also received by Shamlu Dudeja in the 1980s when she founded Self Help Enterprise (SHE) that helped empower women through Kantha embroidery. What makes this embroidery stand out from others is its wide use of running stitches. The repetitive use of running stitches contributes to Kantha's signature wavy effect with wrinkled sides. This traditional technique is mostly applied to garments like sarees, dupattas, churidars, Kurtis, etc., along with other utility products like bed covers, pillow covers, and other house furnishing items. In West Bengal, Kantha is also used in quilting to create light quilts popularized as Nakshi Kantha.

Artisan Mrs. Rupa Baga.

Kantha embroidery is done in a floral design.

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A hand-embroidered Kantha saree.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The tools and raw materials that are used for Kantha embroidery are as follows:

• **Cloth:** It is the base material on which Kantha embroidery is done. Light and medium weight fabrics of cotton and silk are best suited for this work. But nowadays it is stitched on other fabrics like Georgette, crepe, and chiffon as well.

• **Pen:** It is used to illustrate designs over the cloth.

• **Needle:** It is an important tool for embroidery.

• **Thread:** It is used for embroidery purposes.

• **Scissor:** It is used to cut unwanted threads.

Hand sewing needle is used for embroidery purposes.

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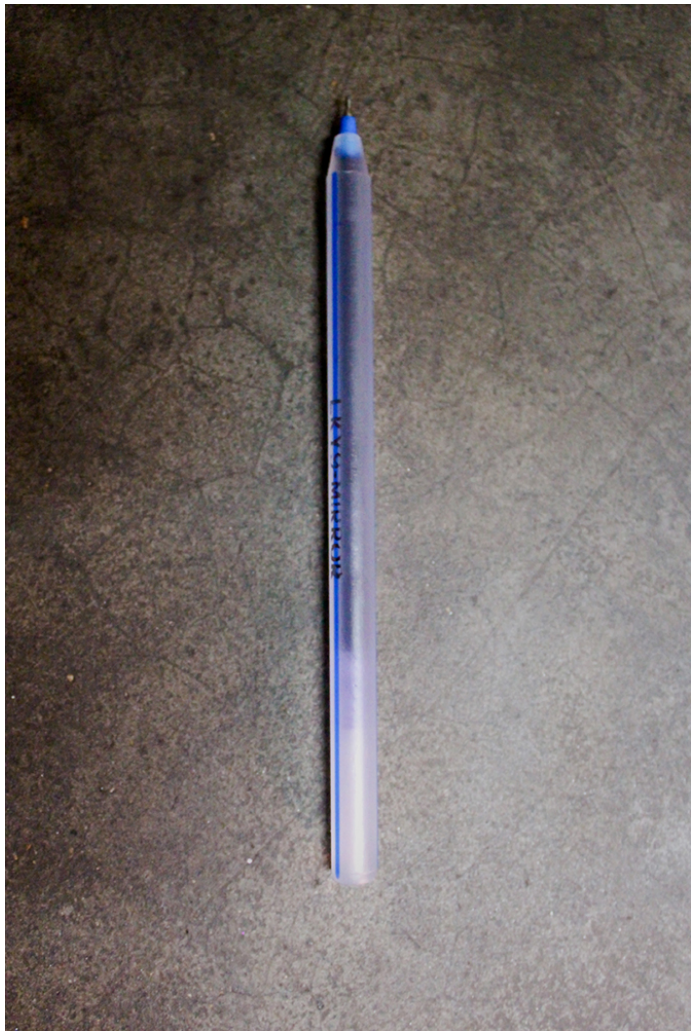
A yellow color cotton thread of DMC Floss 163.



Ballpen is used to draw designs on fabrics.

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Hand scissors are used for cutting purposes.

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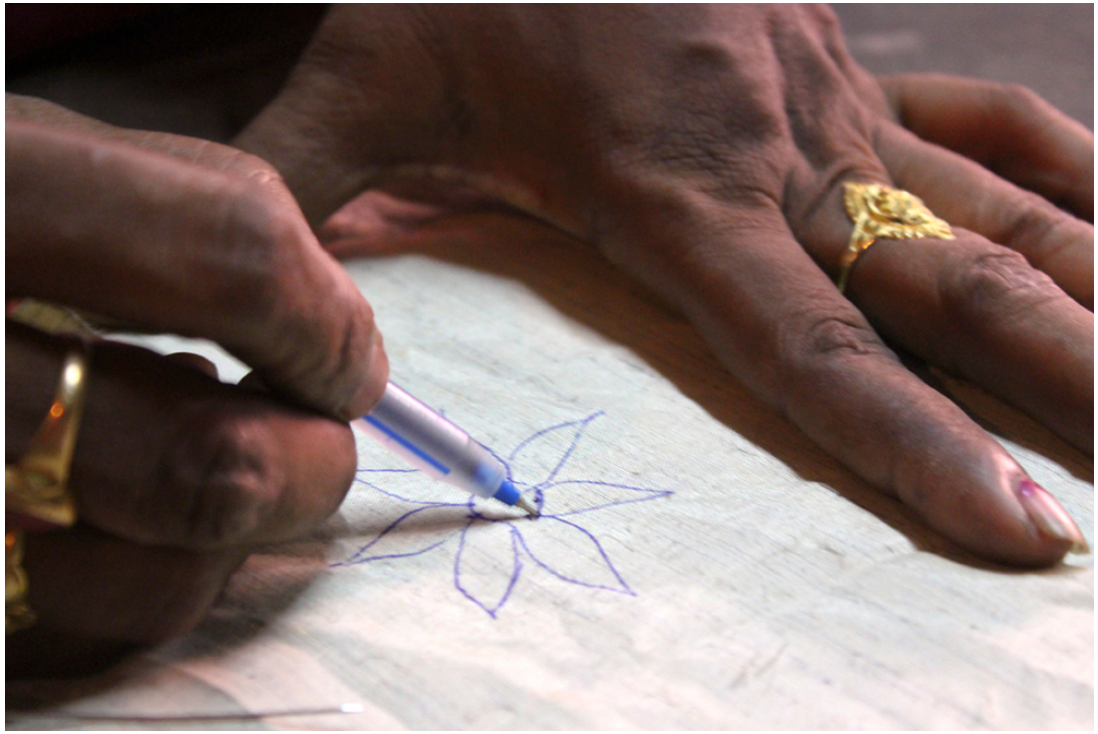
Making Process

Firstly, the artisan draws an intended design over a chosen cloth using a pen. At times, designs are also traced out using carbon paper and tracing paper. Then they proceed to stitch outlines before filling up the design area with running stitches. Here the space between the adjacent line of stitches is kept as minimalist as possible, giving the work a professional and elegant look. For the running stitches, two strands of thread are tied with a knot at one end and then used for stitching. The needle loaded with the thread is raised from below the fabric and taken down instantly after leaving a small gap between the stitches. This method is repeated until the outline is fully done. The interiors of this design are also stitched in the same pattern until the whole illustration is filled. The main advantage of running stitch other than the beauty it provides is that the stitch looks the same at the back end as well as on the front.



Kantha embroidery being drawn on the fabric.

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Artisan loading cotton thread into a hand sewing needle.

Stitching being performed following a design drawn on the cloth.

The artisan filling up the design space with running stitches.

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Kantha embroidery continued along with the design on fabric.

Artisan performing embroidery with a simple running stitch along the edges.

Artisan using a running stitch method in Kantha embroidery.

Artisan displaying a flower design in the middle of the making process.

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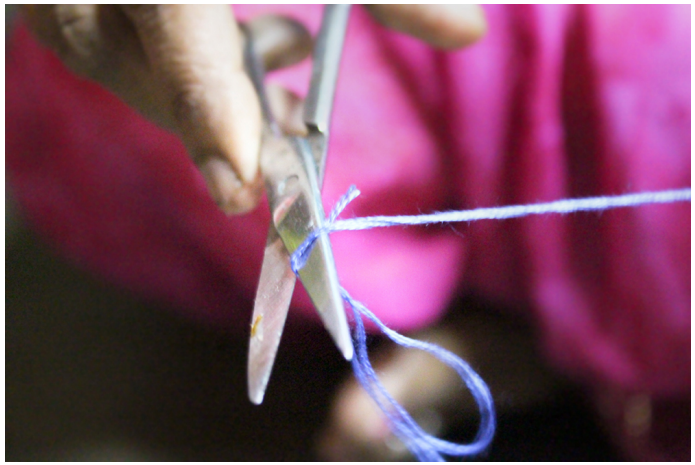
In Kantha embroidery, DMC floss is used to fill the designs.



After the embroidery is done, the extra threads are cut with scissors.

Image showing a backside view of Kantha embroidery.

A floral design of Kantha embroidery.

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Products

Nowadays, Kantha embroidery is mainly used in the modern range of beddings and house furnishing items, along with garments like sarees, dupattas, shirts, and churidars. Motifs of Kantha embroiderers generally bear designs of religious gods, peacocks, tigers, varieties of flowers, and geometrical shapes, all with a tinge of folk-art influence. There are seven different types of Kantha stitches, and they are as follows:

Lep Kantha is used to make warm padded quilts.

Sujani Kantha is worked on bed covers for traditional occasions.

Bayton Kantha fills up the book covers and warpers for precious objects.

Oaar Kantha covers pillow casings.

Archilata Kantha with colorful motifs and borders are used to make coverings for mirrors. Durjani Kantha is small pieces used to make the insides of a wallet.

Rumal Kantha is worked to embellish plates with a lotus motif right in the center.

Tussar silk sarees and bed covers finished with Kantha embroidery costs around INR 1800, while good quality cotton Kurtis bearing Kantha embroidery comes for INR 700 to INR 800.

Kantha embroidery for neck design.

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Beautiful Kantha embroidery on the blouse.

Blouse back neck with Kantha hand embroidery designs.

Close-up view of Kantha embroidery on fabric.

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